

Original Article

Leveraging Tiered Instruction Strategy to Enhance Reading Comprehension and Quality Education: An Action Research among Early Elementary Learners in the Philippines

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Abstract

Background: This action research explored the effectiveness of the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) in enhancing reading comprehension among Grade 3 pupils in a private elementary school in Cebu City. Grounded in differentiated instruction and data-informed teaching, the study aimed to address varying reading levels to promote inclusive and equitable learning.

Methods: The study adopted a pretest-posttest design using standardized Excelandia Diagnostic and Achievement Tests. Pupils were grouped into three instructional tiers based on their English grades and received weekly 40-minute sessions targeting six core reading domains.

Results: Results showed statistically significant improvements in five of the six domains, including Sequencing ($t = 13.20, p < .05$), Cause and Effect ($t = 17.69, p < .05$), Fact and Opinion ($t = 22.88, p < .05$), and Making Inferences and Conclusions ($t = 22.14, p < .05$). Predicting Outcomes showed no significant gain ($t = -2.04, p < .05$). The overall comprehension score rose from 55.84% to 65.94%, affirming a significant improvement ($t = 13.03, p < .05$). Teacher reflections supported these results, highlighting increased engagement, better skill acquisition among high achievers, and the benefit of small-group learning.

Conclusion: The findings support using tiered reading interventions guided by continuous assessment. This model offers actionable recommendations to improve instructional design and literacy outcomes in early-grade classrooms.

Keywords

reading comprehension, tiered instruction, differentiated learning, SDG 4, quality education, early literacy, Philippine education, teacher reflection, reading interventions

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational pillar in a child's educational journey, shaping their capacity to absorb content, think critically, and engage meaningfully with the world around them. Literacy has become a key focus of educational reforms globally, particularly in developing countries where learning gaps persist.

In the Philippines, these gaps are most pronounced during the early years of formal education. The 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that only 24% of Filipino students reached Level 2 or above in reading (mean score 347 vs. OECD average 476), placing the Philippines in the bottom 10 globally—highlighting an urgent need for responsive, evidence-based literacy instruction (Chi, 2023). Addressing this challenge is not just a matter of academic success but also of equity, access, and ensuring every child's right to succeed.

Education stakeholders have recently called for more targeted and differentiated interventions that adapt to learners' unique needs. Researchers such as Adlof et al. (2014) and Dorigo (2023) have demonstrated that structured and evidence-based reading interventions significantly enhance literacy outcomes for English learners, particularly when instruction incorporates explicit vocabulary development, guided reading, and scaffolded support. In the Philippine context, local scholars, including Zulueta and Morales (2023), have emphasized the importance of adaptive instructional strategies that evolve in response to learners' progress. Contextualized instruction, structured vocabulary development, and tiered support systems—such as the tiered texts approach for English learners and struggling readers—have proven effective in closing comprehension gaps and promoting inclusive participation (Zhang & Smolen, 2022). These studies provide compelling evidence that literacy interventions should be flexible and grounded in continuous assessment.

Despite this growing body of research, many literacy initiatives in the Philippines remain static and generalized. Interventions are often designed with a one-size-fits-all approach, limiting their impact on diverse learner populations. Classroom-level strategies that personalize learning based on ongoing data remain underutilized, particularly in private school settings where diversity in reading levels is equally apparent. Localized studies that explore how school-led programs—rooted in formative assessment and responsive grouping—can strengthen reading comprehension are still scarce. This research seeks to contribute to that gap.

This action research study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the revitalized Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) in enhancing the reading comprehension of Grade 3 pupils in a private elementary school in Cebu City. The program provided leveled support based on diagnostic results through tiered instruction, allowing pupils to engage in targeted literacy activities such as literary circles, reading corners, and guided immersion. By documenting the impact of this program on key comprehension domains and reflecting on the implementation process, the study offers a replicable framework for improving early-grade literacy in diverse and dynamic classroom environments.

METHODS

Study Design, Population, and Setting

This study adopted a quantitative action research design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) in enhancing the reading comprehension of Grade 3 pupils in a private elementary school in Cebu City. Action research was selected for its practical orientation, empowering teachers to investigate and refine classroom instructional strategies. The researchers combined reflective practice with systematic inquiry to examine the program's instructional impact in real time. The quantitative approach facilitated the collection of measurable data, enabling an objective assessment of pupils' learning progress. This design draws on the work of Adlof et al. (2014), who demonstrated how teachers use structured classroom-based inquiry to examine the feasibility and instructional value of narrative retell interventions among young children. Their study illustrated how cyclical, practitioner-led evaluation can generate actionable insights for early—grade literacy improvement through lesson planning, implementation, observation, and instructional adjustment. The research occurred in a private school recognized for its commitment to quality education. Thirty Grade 3 pupils were purposively selected based on their participation in the RATP. Researchers categorized learners into three performance-based groups using their English subject grades and results from a standardized diagnostic test. These included the Tagaste Group (scores of 79 and below), the Milan Group (scores of 80–89), and the Casiciaco Group (scores of 90 and above). Groupings enabled the delivery of leveled instruction aligned to pupils' reading proficiency. Reassessments conducted at the end of each grading period ensured that group placements remained responsive to learners' evolving needs. This

approach is consistent with the framework proposed by [Fletcher and Vaughn \(2009\)](#), who underscored the value of diagnostic-based grouping within a multitiered Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

Study Variables, Instrument, and Data Collection

The research followed a three-phase structure. During the pre-implementation phase, the research team obtained ethical approval and secured informed consent from parents and pupil assent. A diagnostic test established baseline comprehension levels across six targeted domains. During the implementation phase, pupils attended one 40-minute RATP session each week. Teachers facilitated instruction using structured strategies, such as vocabulary enrichment, guided reading, literary circles, and contextualized comprehension activities, each grounded in best practices for early literacy. Group placements were reviewed and updated at the end of each grading period to ensure the appropriateness of instructional tiering. In the post-implementation phase, pupils completed the same standardized achievement test used at baseline. This phased action plan provided a structured yet adaptive model to assess the intervention's instructional effectiveness.

Data Analysis

To assess reading comprehension, the researchers employed a standardized external instrument to evaluate multiple English proficiency domains. The assessment featured consistent scoring criteria that minimized bias and provided reliable measures of student performance. Researchers classified learners' scores into five proficiency bands: Outstanding (90–100%), Mastering (80–89.99%), Competent (60.01–79.99%), Progressing (30.01–60%), and Starting (0–30%). These benchmarks enabled researchers to track student progress accurately and assess the program's impact. Using a validated, objective tool strengthened the reliability and interpretability of the findings, consistent with the insights of [Brookhart \(2024\)](#), who emphasized the importance of teachers' assessment literacy and the application of sound assessment practices to ensure accurate and equitable evaluation of learning outcomes. The researchers analyzed data from the pretests and posttests using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and conducted paired sample t-tests to determine the significance of learning gains.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers conducted the study strictly adhering to the ethical standards of research. They secured approval from the academic chair and the school principal. Before initiating data collection, they submitted the study for further review by the Center for Policy, Research, and Development Studies (CPRDS). They obtained informed consent from parents and guardians and secured verbal and written assent from the participating students.

The researchers assured all participants of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. No personally identifiable information was collected or disclosed. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Researchers ensured all participants and guardians received clear information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and data privacy measures. The researchers strictly maintained confidentiality and handled all data according to ethical guidelines. These safeguards helped ensure the integrity of the research process and upheld participants' trust in the study.

RESULTS

The results presented in this section summarize the outcomes of the diagnostic and achievement assessments administered to Grade 3 pupils before and after participating in the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP). The data highlight key trends in comprehension across six domains.

Table 1 displays the diagnostic (pretest) scores. Pupils performed strongest in Elements of Story, averaging 80.33%, indicating a Mastering level. Conversely, Fact and Opinion emerged as the most challenging area, with a mean score of 38%. The overall average comprehension score was 55.33%, placing pupils in the Progressing level.

Table 1. Diagnostic (Pretest) Results of the Grade 3 Pupils in Reading Comprehension Skills

Skill Area	Mean Score (%)	Standards Level
Elements of Story	80.33	Mastering
Predicting Outcomes	45	Progressing
Cause and Effect	48.5	Progressing
Sequencing	49.5	Progressing
Fact or Opinion	38	Progressing
Making Inferences and Conclusions	60	Competent
Overall Reading Comprehension	55.33	Progressing

TEACHING LOG READING APTITUDE TIERED PROGRAM (TAGASTE) A.Y. _____				
Grading Period: _____				
DATE	SKILL FOCUS	ACTIVITIES	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	REMARKS
November 18	Recognizing simple cause-and-effect relationships using visual and textual cues	1. A review on the lesson on cause and effect takes place. 2. Pupils are provided with picture cards showing a simple cause and a matching effect card. Example: • Cause: A boy drops his ice cream. • Effect: The ice cream falls on the ground. 3. Pupils are tasked to draw lines to connect each cause to its effect. 4. They are then grouped into three and discuss among them the answers. 5. Checking then takes place	Activity: <i>Matching Causes and Effects</i> On their worksheets, pupils draw lines to connect each cause to its effect or match card pairs. Example: • Cause: A boy drops his ice cream. • Effect: The ice cream falls on the ground.	

Figure 1. Tagaste Teaching Log Sample

TEACHING LOG READING APTITUDE TIERED PROGRAM (MILAN) A.Y. _____				
Grading Period: _____				
DATE	SKILL FOCUS	ACTIVITIES	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	REMARKS
November 18,	Identifying cause or effect in a sentence using contextual clues.	1. A review on the lesson on cause and effect takes place. 2. Pupils are provided with sentences to complete. 3. Pupils are given a worksheet with incomplete sentences that display cause and effect. Examples: • "It rained all day, so ____." • "____ because the dog was hungry." 4. They are then grouped into three and discuss among them the answers. 5. Checking then takes place	Activity: <i>Sentence Completion</i> On their worksheets, pupils fill in the blanks with a cause or effect to complete each sentence meaningfully. Examples: • "It rained all day, so ____." • "____ because the dog was hungry."	

Figure 2. Milan Teaching Log Sample

TEACHING LOG READING APTITUDE TIERED PROGRAM (CASICIACO) A.Y. _____				
Grading Period: _____				
DATE	SKILL FOCUS	ACTIVITIES	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	REMARKS
November 18	Creating own cause-and-effect stories using logical connections.	1. A review on the lesson on cause and effect takes place. 2. Pupils are provided with sentences to complete. 3. Pupils are given a worksheet where pupils write a short paragraph (4-6 sentences) including at least two cause-and-effect relationships. Prompt Example: "One day, Mara forgot her umbrella. What happened next?" 4. Pupils are given a chance to share their stories to their group (group of three). They are to choose a representative who will share the output to the class. 5. Feedbacking then takes place.	Activity: <i>Story Writing</i> On their worksheets, pupils write a short paragraph (4-6 sentences) including at least two cause-and-effect relationships. Prompt Example: "One day, Mara forgot her umbrella. What happened next?"	

Figure 3. Casiciaco Teaching Log Sample

Figures 1 to 3 illustrate differentiated teaching logs used by the Tagaste, Milan, and Casiciaco groups. These visuals demonstrate how instruction was tailored to pupils' reading levels, ranging from visual matching exercises for foundational learners to paragraph writing tasks for more advanced readers.

Table 2. *Achievement (Posttest) Results of the Grade 3 Pupils in Reading Comprehension Skills*

Skill Area	Achievement Score (%)	Standards Level
Elements of Story	86	Mastering
Sequencing	66	Progressing
Cause and Effect	64	Competent
Predicting Outcomes	44	Competent
Fact or Opinion	57	Progressing
Making Inferences and Conclusions	75	Competent
Overall Reading Comprehension	66.17	Competent

Table 3. *Statistical Comparison of Diagnostic and Achievement Results of the Grade 3 Reading Comprehension Using Paired Samples T-Test*

Skill Area	Pretest Mean (%)	Posttest Mean (%)	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Decision
Elements of Story	81.48	86.8	5.33	7.02	9	Significant
Sequencing	50.38	65.84	15.46	13.2	9	Significant
Cause and Effect	47.91	63.51	15.61	17.69	9	Significant
Predicting Outcomes	44.84	43.76	-1.08	-2.04	9	Not Significant
Fact or Opinion	38.61	58.08	19.47	22.88	9	Significant
Making Inferences and Conclusions	60.65	76.34	15.69	22.14	9	Significant
Overall Reading Comprehension	55.84	65.94	10.1	13.03	9	Significant

Table 2 presents the posttest results (achievement). Most comprehension domains showed improvement, with the overall average rising to 66.17%, now within the Competent level. Elements of Story retained the highest performance (86%), while Predicting Outcomes remained the lowest (44%).

Table 3 details the statistical analysis using paired samples t-tests. Five of the six comprehension domains recorded statistically significant gains ($p < .05$), including Sequencing, Cause and Effect, Fact and Opinion, and Making Inferences. Predicting Outcomes did not yield a significant change ($t = -2.04$, $p > .05$).

Teacher-Reported Results

Teachers reported that the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) effectively supported the development of key reading comprehension skills among Grade 3 pupils. They observed significant improvements in domains where students had previously struggled, particularly Sequencing and WH-Questions. According to teacher logs and session notes, no pupil remained in the lowest proficiency level following the intervention.

Across all groups, teachers noted that learners demonstrated increased accuracy and confidence during comprehension tasks. Pupils in the Tagaste and Milan groups showed steady improvement in vocabulary usage and guided reading performance. Meanwhile, pupils in the Casiciaco group maintained high performance and remained consistently engaged during more complex reading activities.

Instructional grouping allowed teachers to deliver targeted support aligned with learners' assessed needs. Teachers observed that tiered instruction helped reduce off-task behavior, as pupils were better able

to access material suited to their current reading levels. Learning activities became more efficient and goal-oriented across all three groups.

However, teachers also documented recurring time-related challenges. The 40-minute sessions were often insufficient to complete instructional cycles, particularly in groups requiring more scaffolding. Additionally, transitions between learning spaces occasionally affected the focus and pacing of sessions.

Teachers emphasized the critical role of ongoing assessment in adjusting instructional strategies to meet students' individual needs. Continuous monitoring of pupil performance enabled timely regrouping and modification of lesson content. Patterns in learner progress across grading periods reflected the impact of this responsive approach.

Overall, teacher-recorded results indicated that the RATP contributed to measurable growth in reading comprehension across multiple domains and that instructional differentiation was central to these improvements.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) significantly enhanced the reading comprehension of Grade 3 pupils across key comprehension domains. Statistically significant gains in five out of six skill areas affirm the impact of differentiated, diagnostic-based instruction. Fact and Opinion recorded the most notable improvement, rising from 38.61% to 58.08%. This finding supports [Zulueta and Morales \(2023\)](#), who emphasized that scaffolded literacy activities cultivate deeper comprehension skills when grounded in real-world contexts.

Substantial progress in Cause and Effect and Sequencing further underscores the value of structured instructional strategies such as guided discussions, sequencing exercises, and analytical prompts. These gains reflect the findings of [Dorigo \(2023\)](#), who reported that scaffolded and culturally responsive approaches significantly improve learners' ability to make connections and interpret textual relationships. While Elements of Story already showed strong pre-intervention performance, the domain continued to improve following the intervention. This outcome reinforces the importance of sustained exposure to narrative elements, even for high-performing readers—a conclusion also supported by [Adlof et al. \(2014\)](#).

In contrast, Predicting Outcomes remained a challenging area. Despite consistent instructional efforts, post-intervention scores showed a slight decline. As a higher-order comprehension skill requiring inference and contextual reasoning, prediction likely demands prolonged modeling and repeated practice. [Wang and Woo \(2020\)](#) recommend integrating prediction-based games and "what happens next?" activities into regular instruction to gradually and meaningfully develop this skill.

Figures 1 to 3 in the teaching logs illustrate how the teachers differentiated instruction across the three tiers. Pupils in the Tagaste Group engaged in visual matching activities, while those in the Milan Group tackled sentence-level inference tasks. Learners in the Casiciaco Group, on the other hand, composed original paragraphs to demonstrate their understanding. This structured progression aligns with [Richards-Tutor et al.'s \(2015\)](#) findings that reading interventions for English learners are most effective when tailored to specific literacy skills and supported by explicit, scaffolded teaching practices.

Teacher reflections echoed the positive results. Instructors observed that performance-based grouping allowed for more responsive and focused instruction. In particular, learners in the Casiciaco Group remained motivated and engaged when given appropriately challenging tasks. These observations align with the findings of [Suprayogi and Valcke \(2016\)](#), who emphasized that effective differentiated instruction—tailored to diverse student needs—can enhance learner engagement, particularly when implemented with clear structure and adequate support.

Despite the program's success, teachers identified logistical challenges. The 40-minute sessions often felt rushed, and transitions between instructional spaces occasionally disrupted focus and instructional flow. These constraints reflect the concerns of [Martinez and Caraballo \(2018\)](#), who emphasized that sustaining effective literacy practices—particularly in multilingual contexts—requires planning that bridges classroom instruction with students' lived experiences and logistical realities.

Ongoing assessment also proved critical in ensuring instructional responsiveness. Teachers relied on

diagnostic and formative data to modify instruction in real time, supporting [Xuan et al. \(2022\)](#) findings that formative assessment significantly improves reading achievement when systematically implemented, particularly through high-quality feedback, effective data use, and student engagement in the assessment process.

The RATP's structured, learner-responsive framework significantly enhanced pupils' comprehension skills across multiple domains. These findings highlight tiered instruction as a scalable and effective strategy for addressing early-grade literacy gaps in diverse Philippine classroom settings. With continued implementation, refinement, and support, such models can potentially transform the delivery of foundational reading instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the Reading Aptitude Tiered Program (RATP) effectively enhanced the reading comprehension of Grade 3 pupils. Based on pre- and post-assessment results from standardized tests, pupils made noticeable progress in important reading areas, including sequencing events, understanding cause and effect, answering WH-questions, and drawing inferences. These gains highlight the value of differentiated instruction, where pupils are grouped and taught based on their reading abilities. The tiered approach—Tagaste, Milan, and Casiciaco—enabled teachers to focus on the specific needs of each group, resulting in more meaningful learning experiences. Teacher reflections confirmed that the program increased student engagement, especially among advanced learners, although there were some challenges, such as limited time and classroom transitions. The results also highlighted areas that require further attention, particularly in predicting outcomes and distinguishing between fact and Opinion. The findings reinforce the importance of targeted, data-informed instruction in helping young learners strengthen their reading skills.

To build on the success of the RATP, a few key improvements are recommended. First, groupings should remain flexible and be updated regularly based on pupil performance, so learners always receive the support they need. Extending the session time from 40 minutes to a full hour weekly would also allow for more thorough instruction, guided practice, and feedback. The researchers recommend further integrating the ROADS (Reading Opens All Doors to Success) program to support vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. They emphasize the importance of providing continuous teacher training to enhance skills in differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and literacy support.

Additionally, conducting follow-up studies that explore how different reading tools—such as digital platforms, printed texts, or audiobooks—impact comprehension can provide valuable insights. Finally, regular program reviews using diagnostic tools and standardized tests should be part of the routine to ensure the program stays effective and responsive to pupils' evolving needs. By taking these steps, the school can continue to improve reading outcomes and help more children become confident, capable readers.

Author Contributions

L. Po, D. F. L. Ersando, M. J. Ersando, D. Homecillo, F. Quitara, M. J. Amaquin, A. Quezon, M.Z. Balanay, & R. Mascardo: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, software, visualization, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing;

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Ethical Approval

The researchers secured approval from the academic chair and the school principal. Before collecting data, they submitted the study for further review by the Center for Policy, Research, and Development Studies (CPRDS). They obtained informed consent from parents or guardians and secured assent from all student participants. The researchers also assured participants of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The corresponding authors will make the data available upon request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use

The authors utilized artificial intelligence (AI) tools and methodologies, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT, for language refinement, formatting, and editorial assistance. After using this tool, the authors evaluated and revised the content as necessary, taking full responsibility for the published content.

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